

Next spring sees arrival of the “**Belfast Bikes**” public hire scheme, a result of an SDLP motion on the issue in 2009. The initial phase will include 300 bikes at docking stations around the city, including one on the Lisburn Road. An annual membership will be £20, with journeys of up to 30 minutes being free and there will be short-term fees for tourists. As well as providing convenient transport for locals and visitors alike, I hope that this scheme will provide a ‘critical mass’ of cyclists and be the catalyst for wider improvements to our cycle infrastructure.

Councillor Claire Hanna and Justin Cartwright thank all those who voted SDLP in the May Council elections and who continue to make SDLP the most popular party in Balmoral. About 300 more votes and SDLP would have won a second council seat in Balmoral! SDLP is represented at Westminster and Stormont by **Alasdair McDonnell MP MLA** and **Fearghal McKinney MLA**



Balmoral Report

Winter 2014

An update from Cllr Claire Hanna



Bin Smart way to more recycling

Claire helped to launch the ‘Bin Smart’ recycling and waste app developed by the Lower Malone Residents Association. The free smartphone app notifications advising residents which bins go out and when in specific areas.

Claire said “*The benefits of recycling, reducing waste and preventing litter are crystal clear – each lorry-load of rubbish sent to landfill costs the city 10 times as much money as the same amount recycled. Even the most enthusiastic recycler can forget which bin to put out on a given day, but innovative projects like this should mean more recycling, fewer overflowing bins and tidier streets.*”

“BinSmart” also tells users what can be put in different recycling bins and allows them to report litter, dumping, and other issues direct to the Council. The app is currently available in the University area and parts of the Lisburn Road but is due to roll out to all areas soon. Claire is also pushing for more types of plastic to be recyclable in blue bins and will keep you posted on this issue.

Arts cuts short sighted

Councillor Claire Hanna has condemned cuts to the NI Tourist Board’s Events Fund as a short-sighted attack on the arts in Belfast. Events like Culture Night, the Belfast Mela and the Cathedral Quarter Arts Festival are set to lose large portions of their funding, despite demonstrating a substantial return on the investment given to them. Claire said “As well life here and supporting genuinely shared space when no formal government strategy is addressing this, the arts are important to the City’s economy. It is a fact that creative cities do better – not only do events encourage people to visit and spend in local shops, cafes and restaurants, but creating a vibrant city is essential to attract high quality international investment. I fear that the arts is seen as a soft target and a victim in the failure of the Stormont Executive to manage their budget, but these cuts will have long term effects.

“Councillors can help ensure you get the best out of public services. If I can help you with a council service or to liaise with external agencies (like NI Water, Roads Service, the Planning Service, etc), please contact me. I’m happy to take on a wide range of cases and help you get the problem sorted out. While I don’t work out of a constituency office, I can meet with you at a time that suits if you’d like to discuss an issue in person. If you’re involved with a group who would like a tour of City Hall do let me know.” Cllr Claire Hanna

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More flooding misery in Balmoral

Many Balmoral residents had an anxious night on Thursday 16 October, with several experiencing internal flooding. Heavier than anticipated downpours resulted in overflowing drains and water logging in many parts of the Lisburn Road, Finaghy and Upper Malone. Balmoral Councillor Claire Hanna said “*This was like groundhog day for many residents. Thankfully, hotspots like Sicily Park and Orchardville narrowly avoiding internal flooding, but residents in Moonstone Street, Greystown and Lille Park weren’t so lucky. Flooding and the stress it causes is now a major quality-of-life issue in this area. Co-ordination has improved, led by Council, with various agencies on the night assisting with drainage and sandbags. However, prevention is of better than cure and helping with clean-up is no substitute for the long overdue infrastructure upgrade South Belfast needs*”

Along with residents and other elected representatives Claire is calling for immediate actions including: effective maintenance of gullies and drains, the acceleration of the ‘Glenmachan Street’ project without any further delays (which will improve the situation for Greystown and streets off the Lisburn Road), agreement on a pumping station at Orchardville, rehabilitation of the culvert behind Upton and Lille Park, and mitigation of M1 overflow pouring rainwater into Ashton. In addition, residents need reassurance on the provision of insurance and faster response on the Floodline. Serious consideration should be given to grants for bespoke ‘Floodgates’ which have successfully prevented damage to a number of homes and which would be much more cost effective than retrospective ‘clean-up’ grants. A community resilience plan, to help coordinate government, affected households and their neighbours, is being piloted around Sicily Park. Claire has copies of household-plan templates available for any interested resident.



Claire joined SDLP Mayor Nichola Mallon to help open South Belfast CityChurch’s Food Fest programme, including the launch of a South Belfast foodbank. Claire said “It’s a sad sign of the times that the churches have had to launch this scheme but I want to congratulate them for their solidarity and action to ensure that the neediest families in our city don’t go hungry. The ‘Foodcloud’ project also helps to connect businesses with excess foods to community groups who can make good use of it, helping to reduce food waste. Pictured: Pastor Damian Wharton, Cllr Mallon and Claire Hanna (with baby Aideen).

Cllr Claire Hanna, Chair of the Planning Committee at Belfast City Council, **has welcomed the adoption of the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (BMAP)** by Environment Minister Mark H Durkan. Drafted in 2004, BMAP is a framework document for Greater Belfast which identifies suitable zones for residential, retail, commercial and industrial use. Claire said “Council takes on wider Planning powers next year and to avoid piecemeal and non strategic development, we need a city wide plan. BMAP was developed with planning ‘best practice’ and is a good basis on which to build a coherent, long term vision for Belfast. Mark H Durkan tried to get the Executive to discuss this on numerous occasions, and was justified in bringing it forward. Any legal action by other parties to overrule him or the document would be a total waste of public funds in a time when budgets are already under enough pressure”.

Claire has sought updated information from Transport NI regarding the ownership and maintenance of stretches of **Newforge Lane**. A substantial stretch of the road is ‘un-adopted’, meaning that it is not maintained by the government / Transport NI and is technically the combined responsibility of the (approximately 60) households that front onto the road. Arrangements can be made for Transport NI to ‘adopt’ the road, but only once it is brought up to their specifications by the frontagers, which would unfortunately be a substantial undertaking in this case. Claire has a copy of a map outlining areas of responsibility and is happy share this with any affected resident and to facilitate discussion with Transport NI.

Unfortunately Claire’s request for speedbumps or **other traffic calming measures in Trossachs** has been turned down by the Department for Regional Development. Monitoring was undertaken (via loops of wire on the road that residents may have noticed) but DRD suggest that the traffic volume and speed do not justify the investment. Claire will request that this is reviewed in Spring. DRD did agree to provide a ‘turning lane’ from Finaghy Road South into Trossachs and the road markings for this have been completed. Claire is also pressing DRD to provide an additional **pedestrian crossing** in at least one new location on **Upper Malone**. Traffic surveys are being conducted at both the House of Sport and outside Old Coach, as these points have additional foot traffic, including children accessing the sports facilities including the Mary Peters Track.

Claire Hanna has welcomed confirmation of substantial funding for a new 3G all-weather pitch at **Woodlands, beside Orchardville**. As well as providing a high quality and versatile surface for team sports and local schools, the increased use of the site will hopefully reduce the use of the facility as a location for underage drinking and related anti-social behavior, which has been a concern for residents in the immediate area. Claire has also worked with residents and the council to ensure that changes to the site do not exacerbate existing flooding concerns. Separately, Claire is encouraging the setting up of a Neighbourhood Watch group for Orchardville following a spate of burglaries during the summer. A similar scheme is working very well in and around Donegall Park and Grangeville and the PSNI Neighbourhood team have committed to supporting the project and hosting a Home Security information and advice event if there is demand.

Campaigning for Child Friendly Belfast

Councillor Claire Hanna has called on OFMDFM to ensure that no local families are left worse off by the proposed scrapping of the Childcare Vouchers scheme for working parents. Claire said “The coalition government in London are cancelling the scheme and replacing it with a complicated tax system which will leave many families here worse off. I’m calling on the Office of First and Deputy First Minister to not just “cut and paste” the legislation to NI, but to amend it to ensure no one here loses the modest but critical savings the current scheme provides. Years on, the OFMDFM have made no progress on a Childcare strategy and there has been no tangible help for working families, many of whom are paying a huge portion of their wages to fund good quality childcare. OFMDFM have a budget of £1m allocated to childcare but have never bothered to spend it. Keeping this scheme will help tackle gender inequality in the workplace and reduce in-work poverty”

Claire has also welcomed the launch of the ‘Breastfeeding Welcome Here’ scheme supported by Belfast City Council. City Hall and also other council venues have committed to offering a place for Mums to breastfeed when out and about. Claire said “Breastfeeding is ideal for both Mums and babies, but rates in NI are among the lowest in Europe. Getting out and about is important for the health of new Mums but feeding on the go can be daunting. Providing this support will help to promote and normalise breastfeeding. I commend all the local cafes and businesses who have joined the scheme and encourage others to sign up and get a certificate to display in their window saying that they welcome new mums, however they choose to feed”



Some members of SDLP Balmoral branch travelled to Edinburgh to observe the Scottish Independence referendum campaign and count in September, meeting with voters and campaigners from both the Yes and No camps. Whatever your view on independence, the debate reflected great credit on the intelligence and maturity of the Scottish people. Debate was vigorous and contested, but crucially, not one drop of blood was spilt. There are so many lessons for us, not least good governance and the relative success of pursuing political goals in a non-violent way. The whole process has invigorated the Scottish political process and civic society. An astonishing 97% of Scots registered to vote and 83.5% turned out on the day.

By contrast, in Balmoral 52.8% of registered voters turned out in May’s Council election with thousands not even on the register. Voting trends in Northern Ireland elections have been on a sharp downward curve for many years, since the Agreement referendum in May 1998 when 81.1.% turned out. I often meet non-voters, either disinterested or disgusted by the current political scene, they are disillusioned, cynical and switched off. While I share the deep frustrations with Stormont’s lack of delivery and the often regressive nature of debate here, I respectfully disagree and would like to put forward some alternative propositions:

- Bad politicians are elected by good people who don’t vote.
- In our democracy, power changes hands through elections so it is vital that they are organised and contested. A tiny minority of the population are active in political parties and this is unhealthy – more engagement should lead to a wider pool of candidates and political priorities that reflect what people actually want and need.
- In general, democratic politicians only have power and influence to get things done in proportion to the mandate given to them by the voters – if you want politicians who want to get things done for you, they need your vote.

You must be the change you wish to see in the world – Mahatma Gandhi

With continued rises in the cost of home heating oil, Belfast City Council has launched a simple toolkit to help groups set up an **Oil Buying Club**. Claire said "Oil Clubs are based on the simple concept that buying in bulk is cheaper. Most people find they save between £10 - £30 per order, and with localised deliveries also meaning fewer trucks on the road. Each club needs someone prepared to be the contact point and coordinator but this new booklet provides all the support and information needed to get a club started, perhaps with neighbours or an existing community group.

Claire has condemned recent **hate and race attacks** on new communities and migrants in Belfast. Claire said “The latest attacks are a sad symptom of the fact that there is a minority of people here who refuse to accept difference. Sectarianism and racism are rooted in the same ignorance. In the main inward migration has been very positive for our economy and cultural life and diversity is nothing to fear. Indeed, I recently attended an Eid celebration dinner with the Belfast Islamic Centre, which reinforced the hugely positive contribution that community alone has made to Belfast in the fields of medicine, business and numerous others.

Most of **Dunmurry Lane has now been reduced to 40 miles per hour** speed limit (from 70mph) following representations on behalf of residents. Transport NI agreed the decision on the basis of the collision history, mean speed, road usage and local topography. Claire has welcomed this sensible decision, not least due to the number of children living nearby, and due to Rathmore school traffic build up at Beechlaw Avenue.

Claire has welcomed the installation of **filter lights at Finaghy** and has requested that Transport NI continue to monitor and adapt traffic light phasing to reduce traffic build-up. Widening works are also proposed at the crossroads to accommodate vehicles. While initial delays were predicted, Claire is pushing to ensure that as well as making it safer to turn off the Upper Lisburn Road, the change reduces the level of traffic in Orpen and in Diamond and Grangeville where new 20 MPH signs are also being erected.